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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 001220

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA. NSC FOR SHAPIRO/KUMAR

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAL](#) [JO](#) [KISL](#) [IS](#)  
SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN RELIGIOUS LEADERS COMPLAIN OF ISRAELI  
INTERFERENCE AT HARAM AL-SHARIF/TEMPLE MOUNT

REF: A. JERUSALEM 630  
[B](#). 08 JERUSALEM 1907

Classified By: DPO Greg Marchese for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The Israeli National Police (INP) are exercising increasing control over the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and interfering with the Jordanian-run Waqf's ability to operate, according to Palestinian religious leaders. The INP, they allege, has prevented the Waqf from carrying out repairs and renovations on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount grounds, and allows tourists to enter without coordination with the Waqf. Palestinians describe INP actions as a breach of bilateral Israeli-Jordanian agreements governing administration of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. The PA Deputy Minister of Religious Affairs accuses the GOI of "testing" Muslim and international reaction in an effort to redefine the status quo. Muslim leaders called for USG intervention to ensure compliance with prior agreements. End Summary.

WAQF SAYS INP INTERFERENCE  
HINDERS OPERATIONS AT THE HARAM  
AL-SHARIF/TEMPLE MOUNT  
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[1](#)2. (C) The head of the Waqf, Azzam al-Khatib, told PolOff June 29 that the INP is exerting increasing control over the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, restricting the Waqf's operations. Al-Khatib said that, prior to the second intifada, the INP stayed outside the gates, leaving internal issues to the Waqf. At the outbreak of the intifada, the Waqf closed the compound to non-Muslims, but the INP opened the Mughrabi Gate to tourists several years later without coordination with the Waqf, al-Khatib said. The INP now moves freely around the compound. The number of INP-escorted Jewish groups who pray at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount during Jewish holidays has increased in the past few years, in spite of agreements that no non-Muslim religious practices would take place in the area, al-Khatib added.

[1](#)3. (C) Al-Khatib told PolOff the INP has prevented Waqf workers from carrying out repairs and renovations on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount grounds. The INP stopped projects to retile walkways, remove dirt during renovations, and repair the Cotton Merchants Gate. He said the Waqf needs to prepare for an influx of worshippers during Ramadan, but the INP has prevented even basic preparations, such as installing temporary speakers and lights.

MUSLIM OFFICIALS SAY GOI  
IGNORING AGREEMENTS  
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[1](#)4. (C) Al-Khatib warned that the Waqf cannot allow its authority over the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount to erode. The GOI is not respecting agreements reached with the

Government of Jordan on this matter, he said. The Waqf has sent letters to the INP and reached out to the GOI through the Jordanian Embassy, he said, but the GOI has not responded. Al-Khatib requested USG intervention to encourage the GOI to abide by bilateral agreements on control of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount.

¶5. (C) The PA Minister of Religious Affairs, Mahmud al-Habbash, told PolChief July 14 that the INP's actions at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount constitute harassment of Muslims. In addition to preventing work on the compound, he said, police officers do not treat worshippers -- particularly women -- with respect as they enter. Al-Habbash said he is concerned that problems at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount could ignite an already tense situation in Jerusalem, and he encouraged the USG to ask the GOI to handle the situation more carefully.

GOI TESTING REACTION, TRYING  
TO ESTABLISH NEW RULES?  
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¶6. (C) The Deputy Minister of Religious Affairs, Salah Zuhayka, told PolOff July 8 that he believes the GOI is "testing" the limits of its control at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, possibly in a bid to redefine the status quo on the compound. He said, as an example, that the INP has closed portions of the compound for unspecified security reasons in recent months, without coordinating with the Waqf. Zuhayka noted that Israeli Minister of Internal Security Yitzhak Aharonovich -- accompanied by the INP -- entered the al-Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock on June 23

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without prior coordination with the Waqf.  
WALLES